THE LITTLE NAPOLEON.

Donn Piatt Tells a Bit of Unwritten History.

He Says He Abhors and Despises Old Battle Fields—And Hates Canned Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

I have no taste for battle fields—very little, I assure you, while the killing goes on; as vulgar little boys say, "I've been there," and yet less when the field becomes historical. In the last instance one looks on wide plains, with occasional depressions or gullies and groups of trees, and while one gazes with the intensity of expression peculiar to a salt mackerel, a featherless parrot of a guide on one side bores one with a story made up of lies and stupidity, while hungry-looking creatures bore on the other with rusty specimens of iron mongery, said to be relics, but really manufactured, to sell, at the nearest forge. I therefore abhor and despise old battle fields, and once hastened through Brussels after night lest some misbegotten son of man should force me out to Waterloo.

I made an exception, however, of Gravelotte when later in Europe. A particular admiration of mine came to grief on this field, and in honor of the event I traveled fifty miles out of my way to take off my hat and thank God. At this place a Prussian bayonetted a French mumbo-jumbo, and as the bran ran out, one of the most aggravating frauds disappeared from public view. I refer to Louis Napoleon, a French gentleman, of Dutch extraction, whom thirty years since I pronounced a fool, and, therefore, felt complimented in having my better judgment approved at Gravelotte.

Louis Napoleon had but one distinctive mark of the Bonaparte family, and that was in his vicious imbecility. I saw him for the first time shortly after he had been proclaimed emperor, and I was amazed. He appeared before me, short of stature, but so was his uncle, the great Napoleon; but instead of the heavy, rounded shoulders and Cæsarian head, he was narrow in the chest, broad across the hips, had a long body and short legs, while his contracted, retreating jaw was surmounted by a fat nose and eyes that were the deadest things I ever looked into.

The Bonaparte family are strongly marked physically. The son and grandson, born in Baltimore, were wont to startle the people of Paris by their striking resemblance in form and face to the great Napoleon.

Of this Louis Napoleon had no trace whatever. He was a stupid-looking Dutchman, and did not belie his looks.

I was laughed at for asserting this some thirty years ago. There is nothing so successful as success, as the late President Garfield was fond of quoting and lived to illustrate. It was a sarcasm on the lips of the French Bohemian who originally uttered it, but has come to be an axiom with us, who live on canned fruit from the tree of knowledge.

Louis Napoleon's rise was the result of mere chance offered an idiot. It takes a thoughtless man to accept, or rather seize on an unexpected opinion. It is the unexpected that happens, again quoth Garfield, and the thoughtful man hesitates discounting the future, until the chance disappears. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and, in some instances, triumphantly. Had Louis Napoleon possessed more sense he would have been less successful.

The scheme of government offered him was the most idiotic ever concocted by fools and knaves. There is no lie so ridiculous, and yet so popular as that which tells us that history repeats itself. While men remain the same, through all ages, the variety of life is infinite. As we clear away the old forest, a second growth starts up, and, to the common eye, it is the same wood. Those who look deeper see the hickory, and cedar where the oak, and ash, and walnut once stood. So is it with humanity. The form may be there, but the substance has vanished.

When Napoleon, the little, was bidden follow the footsteps of his uncle, the Napoleonic or Cæsarian superstition of one man being necessary to a people, a sort of God's anointed to govern by grace, had vanished from France. After the great Napoleon had conquered Europe he hid his little person under gorgeous robes, while clapping on his remarkable head a bauble in shape of a crown, and all men fell before him, bumping their heads on the floor in his presence for the roar of his victorious artillery was yet in their ears.

Napoleon, *le petit*, let the robes and crown severely alone, for he began where the uncle had ceased, with no superstition to sanction and no military prestige to back his pretensions. Fool as he was, he yet knew that all France would break into roars of laughter at his play of ringmaster in the garb of a crown.

The uncle had said that the empire was war. The nephew was forced to proclaim that the empire was peace. So long as he abided by this he was safe—all the more so, because his feeble minded condition made his empire a standing menace to all Europe.

The times had changed. The intellect of France had at last discovered that military genius, as it had been called was only an animal instinct of a low order, and the fellows who bedizen themselves with tinsel to follow the brutal trade of killing have the brain, as well as the feathers, of chicken cocks. God's anointed had been relegated to things which amuse. Hereditary government had stood everything but ridicule, but when the people began to laugh, the poor devil of a king, or emperor, got into a hole. Louis Philippe was the last, and he went about with his pumpkin-shaped head, and a cotton umbrella under his arm, calling himself citizen king.

France got ennuied of the little Napoleon's play at being emperor. It was sick of his solemn ways, his gorgeous court; and, above all, it was sick of the plundering that went on making millionaires out of small-brained rogues. I never knew a millionaire who made his money who was not of that sort. So when the German war broke out, France was content to see the little emperor go under.

This war, provoked by France, was religious in its origin. Bismarck found his project of German unity antagonized by the church. The German statesman did not submit patiently to this and made himself extremely disagreeable to Rome. The Catholics of Europe believed that it would be a good thing to give Bismarck something to do, and so a Catholic power, much given to conquering Europe, was hurled upon him. They held council on the subject and resolved that it would be wise to set His Catholic Majesty, their friend Louis Napoleon, at the throat of William. They thought William would then have occupation enough without bothering himself about the rights, privileges and possessions of the church.

In this they were greatly aided by Her Imperial Majesty, Empress Eugenia, the prettiest woman with the worst temper and least brain in all France. She convinced her absurd husband that the only way to save the empire and secure his dynasty was to make war on Prussia. So, one bright day, little Louis marched his armies toward the German frontier.

The world, believing Prussia unprepared, thought the little man in red breeches would march unmolested to Berlin. The good priests at Metz, where the church has large possessions, told me of their amazement and alarm, not to say disgust, on finding that the hundred and twenty thousand troops Napoleon brought with him to that town were no better than a mob. The discipline for which the French armies were so famous had all disappeared. Officers and men mingled together, on a footing of equality, in drinking shops. They sang the Marsellaise and uttered aloud the most alarming communistic sentiments.

There seemed to be a poor supply of ammunition, and a worse provision for support. Military agents hurried from shop to shop at Metz, purchasing on promises to pay, all the dealers had to sell. The Jesuit fathers, my informants, had long known that the Imperial government was bankrupt, but for the first time they learned that the rot had reached the army. The fatal delay at Metz had its origin in the frantic effort to supply the army of invasion with the necessary supplies to enable it to move forward.

Louis Napoleon, while possessed of what we call moral courage, for want of a better name, had very little of that pluck which we share, at long intervals, with the bulldog and the gamecock. He had a strange prejudice against dying at all, but especially a violent death. He had incurred the contempt of his marshals and soldiers by a show of the white feather in former wars, and in view of this he had no intent to go further, at the head of his troops, than the frontier.

To keep up appearances, and preserve, if possible, the little popularity left the empire, a purely French bit of dramatic effect was projected in that absurd advance on Saarbruck, when the unfledged prince had his baptism of fire.

Various stories are told on the spot, concerning this baptism, but one must remember that they come from the enemy, not possessed of much love or admiration of the "little Lulu," as he was termed, in derision. The stone is yet shown—or at least a part of it, for enthusiastic Americans and English have chipped much of it off to carry away as precious relics—on which the hopeful heir to the Cæsarian idea placed that part of his imperial person where the legs end and the body begins, immediately after his baptism of fire.

After the so-called battle and baptism, His Imperial Significance called the general in command to the side of his carriage, and said in a loud voice:

"General, your heroic conduct and that of your gallant soldiers content me. Go on as you have begun; carry the eagle of the empire ever to victory; and, in return for your service to-day, I create you Marshal of France, with the proud title of Duke of Saarbruck."

The little general threw himself upon his knees, and beating his manly breast with the fervor of a French actor, cried:

"And I, sire, swear on the faith of a Christian and the honor of a soldier, to be the first to enter Berlin."

Poor little man, he disappeared there and then from public gaze, but the beautiful scene he assisted to make enjoyable remains in his story as the last bit of *opera bouffe*, called the empire, that for twenty years had amused humanity and ruined France.

His Imperial Majesty soon found that, instead of invading, his country was being invaded, and the noise and confusion that accompanied frightful defeats so affected his imperial health that he had to hurry forward his original design of selecting a general to take his place, and return to Paris.

To this end he called together his head officers, to select by ballot his successor in command. The choice fell upon Bazaine by an unanimous vote. The emperor, patting the newly selected commander on the shoulder in that patronizing manner peculiar to emperors, asked his plan of operation. Bazaine replied promptly, to withdraw from before Metz, form a junction with the other army corps, so as to cover Paris, and while acting purely on the defensive, not only oppose the Germans but hold Paris in subjection. And here came the argument that satisfied Louis Napoleon, if any were necessary, in Bazaine saying "If the news of these defeats reach Paris in the absence of the army the turbulent masses will drive out the empress, and put an end, sire, to your dynasty."

The cause of Bazaine's subsequent departure from the wise policy he had planned can be accounted for only in the fact that it was made in view of a deep laid scheme to rid both army and empire of a ridiculous and fatal incumbrance in the shape of Louis, and setting up the prince under a military protectorate. The scheme miscarried, and nothing was left to the conspirators but the treachery that lost the army and branded Bazaine as a traitor to his country.

Bazaine further suggested that the emperor should accompany the army as it fell back, each day selecting some house in advance as headquarters on the line of march. Consenting to this, the residence of a Madame Enoch, in Longville, some two miles from Metz, was chosen for the night, and to this humble abode Louis Napoleon betook himself in a very quiet manner, leaving the little Lulu so lately baptized by fire with Bazaine, at the marshal's request.

I visited the residence of Madam Enoch a respectable, hearty looking lady, on the shady side of forty. Her house stands on the south side of the street, hemmed in on each side by taller buildings, and almost hid from view by a high wall in front. It is a comfortable little home, but quite removed from the palatial fringe work to which the shaky emperor had accustomed himself. The best bed room was assigned to the imperial guest, and he retired for the night, sorely oppressed, it is to be presumed, by the decay of both body and fortune.

The next morning he was startled, as, indeed, the village was, by the explosion of a shell almost under his window, in the little front lawn of Madam Enoch's house. The explosion broke in the door, smashed all the glass and started the wall in front from its foundation. The madam, superintending the preparation of breakfast for her distinguished guest, ran in great alarm to his room. At the door she encountered His Majesty, partially dressed. They ran together so suddenly that they nearly embraced. Pale as his bilious complexion would permit, he staggered back, and leaning against the side of the door, cried wildly:

"See, see, see how my generals treat me. They said I would be safe here from the Prussians. I am in their midst. My generals do not know where the Prussians are."

The good woman took the frightened man by the arm and led him to the grounds in the rear of her house.

"What you say, sire," she exclaimed in a low tone, "is only too true, unless this means something worse. The prince is left with Marshal Bazaine, while an attempt is made on your life. But your generals do not know where the Prussians are. For two weeks past your troops have been defeated from surprises."

"What am I to do? What am I to do!" piteously demanded the great emperor of a poor woman.

"I would advise you, sire, to withdraw to some place not so well known to either your own generals or the Prussians."

"Where is that, madame!" he eagerly demanded.

She thought a moment and said: "My gardener, sire, has a house in Gravelotte. It is an humble abode, but there you can remain concealed, and I believe in safety, until I can communicate with your real friends."

The poor man consented, and hastily swallowing a cup of coffee the good woman forced upon him, he submitted to a disguise that consisted of a cloak, and a handkerchief tied over the lower part of his face to conceal his heavy moustache, and thus arrayed the imperial dynasty was helped into an old voiture, drawn by an aged, rheumatic horse and driven by the gardener. What a spectacle was that! But a few days before this emperor had marched out of Paris at the head of an immense army, amid waving banners, to martial music and exclamations of an excited populace, and now, sick at body and sick at heart, worn, wasted and feeble, he was lifted into an old voiture by two women and a laborer, to flee in disguise from his own troops, whom he distrusted, and from Prussians he very properly feared.

The mystery of that exploded shell has never been, and probably never will be, solved. It was the one shell sent into Longville that day. It came so well directed and did its work so near its intent that one doubts whether it was manufactured at Berlin or Paris, and whether we have to compliment the Prussian artillery on its aim or the sagacity of certain French conspirators who saw that a military protectorate of a docile prince would be wiser than the control of a wrong-headed imbecile whose vanity had nearly ruined France.

Be that as it may, the disguised despot jolted safely over the cobble stones of the highway until he reached his destination.

I visited that, also. It is No. 6 on the one street of Gravelotte, and I can testify that it is humble enough. The few rooms are of low ceiling, stone floor, with that lack of ventilation that marks the home of an European laborer and makes the cholera welcome. The emperor, helped down from his hard seat in the voiture, limped into the best room on the arm of the gardener, and sank into an old armchair covered with a red cotton stuff that is yet shown to the visitor.

He sat for six hours without moving, and gazed with those red, fishy eyes of his as if stunned and dazed by the terrible events being enacted about him. One could almost pity this blood stained, perjured actor of the *coup d'état*, who had watered the streets of Paris with the innocent blood of men, women and children, and had not sense enough to be even a charlatan. Twenty years of empire had passed, in which he had played so conspicuous a part. He saw himself lifted from a ridiculous obscurity to the first throne of Europe, to reign a despot over the greatest nation, and the most enlightened people the world ever knew. He saw himself made the instrument to humble Russia, and secure as a reward the gracious acquaintance of a queen, whose recognition was a patent of royalty. He saw again the armies of France, under his command, roll back the Austrian usurpers, and restore the nationality of Italy. He saw himself feared and even respected, the acknowledged head of the first war power and foremost nation of the world. And now he sat deserted and alone in this miserable abode, with all his empire crumbling about him, under fearful blows from a power he had despised, and treachery from those he had fed and favored. Of all the co-conspirators against popular rights, called friends, who had helped him to power, over the ruins of the Republic, in years gone by, not one remained. They were dead, or recognizing his failing fortunes, had deserted him. They had given him brain and courage.

The keen, cool man of the world, De Morney, his supposed illegitimate half-brother, who escaped the Napoleonic imbecility through his mother; the audacious adventurer, Marshal St. Arnaud; that youthful statesman Thouvenel, whose mind had genius that made intuition learning, and whose state papers confounded the ablest diplomats of Europe, were dead, and the rest, low villains generally, they who had aided in inaugurating assassination, under the name of empire, had all slunk away from the doomed man, who could well say with Macbeth:

"I have lived long enough; my way of life
Is fallen into the sere and yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have."

For six hours he sat in silence, and at the end of that time His Imperial Majesty smelled something. Lifting his majestic nose, with a snuff, he said to the wife of the gardener:

"Madame, do you not cook something?"

"Yes, sire; some onion soup for my husband."

"Can you give me some?"

"Most willingly, sire."

And in an iron pan, with an iron spoon, the hungry emperor found a meal that he ate heartily, and then said:

"Madame, that is the best dinner I ever tasted."

That night the prince imperial joined his father, and the two retired, and it is supposed slept, for nothing was heard until near daylight, when an officer awakened the emperor with a message from Bazaine that informed him that he was to hasten and join McMahon without a minute to lose.

Once more, pulling the old cloak about him, he mounted the hard carriage with his boy, and fled into the night, that was to form his night, indeed. We hear of him again stopping at a farm house and begging rest and refreshment, to learn in alarm that the Prussians, whose lines were closing about Metz, had been searching the place, looking for the fugitive empire, or empiric, that they captured a few days after.

Had this man died in the roar of battle, at the head of his brave army, a great wrong would have been done mankind. The lesson his infamous career taught France and the world would have been lost. He tried to throw light upon himself and make us doubt, in his distinguishing Bonaparte traits and ignoble end, the story of his Dutch extraction. Like all genuine Bonapartes the world over, his treachery was only equalled by his cowardice.

DONN PIATT.

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